DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 365 895 CG 025 157

AUTHOR Gonzalez, Gerardo M.
TITLE We've Come a Long Way Baby: Issues and Progress in National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week.
PUB DATE 29 Sep 93
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Anniversary Celebration for National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week (10th, College Park, MD, September 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Alcohol Abuse; *Alcohol Education; *College Students; Drinking; Higher Education; *Student Problems
IDENTIFIERS *National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week

ABSTRACT

The initial planning of the first National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week is described, the formation of an official student group (BACCHUS) to confront the problem of alcohol abuse is noted, and the history of BACCHUS and of National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week is tracked. The controversy over the involvement of the alcoholic beverage industry in alcohol education is discussed and the challenges of evaluating the effectiveness of alcohol education efforts are considered. Trends in how colleges and universities have dealt with the issue of alcohol abuse over the past 10 years are reviewed. The document concludes by pondering whether BACCHUS and National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week have made a positive contribution to the social and cultural changes that occurred on campuses with regard to drinking, whether industry support has played a role in the prevention of alcohol abuse, and whether the social and cultural changes that have taken place on campuses over the past 10 years would have occurred without the involvement of BACCHUS and National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week activities. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 365 895

We've Come A Long Way Baby: Issues and Progress in National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week

By

Gerardo M. Gonzalez, Ph.D.

Associate Dean and Professor

College of Education

University of Florida

Presented at

The 10th Anniversary Celebration for

National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week

University of Maryland

September 29, 1993

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG025157

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. Gonzalez

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

First, I want to say how pleased I am to be a participant in this tenth year celebration of National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week. It is hard to believe that a decade has passed since the first Week's kickoff conference right here at the University of Maryland. Considering that over 3000 American and Canadian colleges will participate in this program this year, I feel quite justified in saying "we've come a long way baby."

Since I was one of the people present at the initial planning meeting for the first National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week, I would like to give you a brief history of what brought us here and, perhaps, encourage you to think about where we might go in the future. National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week is a product of BACCHUS and the Inter-Association Task Force on Alcohol Issues. BACCHUS was founded nearly twenty years ago, in 1975, at the University of Florida, when a group of students and I, who was a graduate student at the time, decided to organize as an official student group. We decided to be recognized as a student group in order to access institutional resources and provide a network of peer support for our efforts to raise awareness about alcohol abuse on campus. With the help of Dr. Tom Goodale, who was then Dean of Students at the University of Florida, we quickly became a viable and active student organization on campus. The concept of college students organizing to confront the problems of alcohol abuse was so innovative and unique at the time, that whatever we did by way of programming became the focus of intense media attention. Before long, with the help of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, who provided the initial funding, we established BACCHUS chapters on several other campuses in Florida.

Then in 1979 the big break came: NBC Nightly News heard about our work and decided to do a special program on BACCHUS. NBC told an immense national audience that BACCHUS students were actively engaged in positive activities designed to confront one of the great scrooges of our time, alcohol abuse. While many people had talked and written about the virtues of peer involvement in substance abuse prevention, here was a group of real life, young people putting the peer concept to work in one of the most unlikely settings, the college campus. Needless to say, we were an instant national celebrity. many people took note of our work and the accolades begun to pour in.

Among the many people who noticed our work were members of the liquor industry. The liquor industry has a trade association called the Distilled Spirits Council of The United States, or DISCUS for short. Like all trade associations, DISCUS closely monitors the media, particularly the national media, for any messages that may present their member's products in either a positive or negative way. It did not escape them that here in Gainesville was a group of college students putting to work the ideas that they have always maintained would be a better alternative for alcohol abuse prevention than prohibition or, as they are fond of saying, neoprohibitionist approaches which seek to curtail the industry's freedom to promote and sell their products. Thus, soon after the NBC segment aired, I was contacted by the head of the DISCUS public relations office wanting to meet with me to learn more about BACCHUS .

As a result of that meeting, DISCUS agreed to provide some financial support and technical assistance to expand BACCHUS into a nationwide organization. Soon thereafter, efforts were begun to have BACCHUS chartered

as a national not-for-profit corporation. At the same time that these efforts were going on, Miller Brewing Company took an interest in BACCHUS. Under the advise of a team of consultants who had a long history of work with both DISCUS and other alcohol beverage industry groups, I was invited to Milwaukee to meet with the senior management of Miller Brewing Company. The focus of the meeting was to discus BACCHUS and its approach to alcohol education on campus. Apparently they were impressed by what they heard because a short time later Miller announced that they would be making a $100,000 contribution to BACCHUS. This was by far the largest corporate contribution committed to BACCHUS. However, before we would receive the funds, we needed to finalize our incorporation process and receive tax excempt status from the IRS. This required all of the standard procedures such as drafting a charter, naming a Board of Trustees, filing with the IRS, etc. With the assistance of DISCUS attorneys, these procedures were finalized by the end of 1980. Soon thereafter we received Miller's first of several $100,000 contribution.

The first Board of Trustees of BACCHUS was an interesting mix of people. They were mostly liquor and beer executives, their representatives, and educators- most of whom were student affairs administrators. In addition, a national advisory council was formed which was headed by Dr. Otis R. Bowen, M.D., who at the time was Governor of Indiana. Dr. Bowen later went on to become the Secretary of Health and Human Services under the Reagan Administration. Perhaps the overriding concern of the Board of Trustee and the Advisory Council during the first few years of BACCHUS national was to diversify the organization's sources of funds. The liquor and beer executives worried that BACCHUS' credibility and therefore its effectiveness as an alternative to the "neoprohibitionist" approaches would be undermined if it was

perceived as an instrument of the industry. The educators worried that BACCHUS' acceptability on campus would be compromised. However, we were never very successful in diversifying our financial base. The fact is that we depended on the liquor and beer money for our existence. Even after a professional fund-raiser was hired and a great deal of time was spent on getting other funding, our efforts met with only limited success. In fact, our most successful venture into diversification was achieved when the liquor and beer companies that were supporting BACCHUS asked their suppliers (i.e., the glass makers, grain operators, packaging companies) to join them in support of BACCHUS. Prodded by some of their biggest customers, many of these suppliers came through.

Given this concern with not being perceived as an industry program, the chairman of our Board in 1981, Dr. Gary North, an educator (we've always had an educator as chairman of the Board), who was president of the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I) at the time, had an ingenious idea. He thought that if we could not diversify our financial sources, perhaps we could broaden our programmatic support in cooperation with other groups that did not have close ties to the alcohol beverage industry. He felt that if we could form partnerships with other higher education associations, we would enhance our credibility on campus and help counter some of the criticism we were receiving for being too closely tied to the industry. Thus, using his contacts and the contacts of other educators on the Board of Trustees, we invited some of the key higher education associations to join BACCHUS in a partnership to promote alcohol education on campus. The result was the formation of the Interassociation Task Force on Alcohol Issues, which as you know is today the sponsor of National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week.

Among the first associations to join BACCHUS on this effort were the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), The National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) and ACUHO-I. One of the first issues this group addressed collectively was the marketing of alcoholic beverages on campus. At the time there was a great deal of discussion and media attention focused on the way alcoholic beverages, particularly beer, were marketed on campus. Several organizations and major editorials had called for a ban on college marketing of alcohol. Therefore, as an alternative it was proposed that the Interassociation Task Force developed a set of guidelines that would permit the continued marketing of alcoholic beverages on campus, but would do so under more controlled and acceptable conditions. For example, chuck-a-lugs would be prohibited, the portrayal of women as sex objects would be discouraged, etc. Working closely with the Miller Brewing Company, who was still BACCHUS' largest benefactor, the Task Force developed a set of guidelines that were acceptable to the industry and the college community. These guidelines were then endorsed and promoted through the various Task Force associations and other higher education groups. Of course, there were many people both inside and outside of the higher education community who felt that the best approach would have been to ban college marketing altogether. And, there were several instances where the brewing companies, including Miller, violated the standards embodied in the guidelines. However, in general, there is agreement that the guidelines contributed to an improved campus environment regarding the marketing of alcoholic beverages to students.

By 1983, the Interassociation Task Force had grown by several higher education association members and plans were well on the way for the first National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week. Once again, it was the alcoholic beverage industry that provided most of the funds for the creation of this program. As it is true today, it was mostly the beer companies, first Anheuser-Bush and later Coors, who provided most of the printed materials, awards money, public relations, etc. that go into making this program possible.

The issue of alcoholic beverage industry involvement in alcohol education is as controversial today as it was when DISCUS and Miller made their first contributions to BACCHUS. As a nation, we have never come to grips with the question of what should be the proper role of alcohol in our society. Consequently, there is disagreement about whether the alcoholic beverage industry can legitimately contribute to the prevention of the problems related to the use of their products. Some people feel that the alcoholic beverage industry does not do enough to support alcohol education and prevention efforts. Others would argue that the industry should not be allowed to participate in any prevention programs because they will always use the opportunity to maintain a more favorable position in the market place.

In my view, there is some truth to both sides of this debate. For example, tonight Coors Brewing Company is sponsoring a reception on Capitol Hill for this year's ten National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week award winner institutions and their representatives in Congress. At that reception, Coors will present checks to each of the winners. Ostensibly, the reception is designed to show the Senators and Representatives the outstanding alcohol education programs going on in their states. However, this will also be a way of letting the

congressmen know that Coors is supporting alcohol education programs in their states. These are the same congressmen who could potentially be asked to vote later this year on whether or not to raise taxes on alcohol as a way to help pay for President's Clinton's Health Care Reform Proposal. Would the Senators and Representatives be less inclined to vote to raise taxes on alcohol if they know that Coors is helping campus alcohol education programs in their states? Hard to tell. Would these same congressmen be less likely to vote to support a ban on alcohol advertising or stricter health warnings on alcohol if such legislation was proposed as a way to prevent alcohol abuse? Again, hard to tell.

On the other hand, why shouldn't Coors, Anhauser-Bush, Miller Brewing Company, DISCUS and all the other major industry players be asked to participate in what amounts to a consumer education program about the dangers of abusing their products? And when they do, why shouldn't they be recognized? To me, the question is not whether the industry should be involved in alcohol abuse prevention, but rather whether the industry does enough. The amount of money that all of the industry combined puts into alcohol education is negligible compared to the cost of even a small tax increase on their products. If in fact being a "good corporate citizen" by contributing to alcohol education programs helps the industry avoid some of the most restrictive alcohol abuse prevention measures being proposed, then those of us in higher education should ask ourselves whether we're getting our money's worth when the industry essentially buys the right to be associated with our programs on campus. Remember, they are not giving us this money out of purely altruistic motives. It is part of a carefully calculated strategy to minimize the risk, at least as they perceive it, of more counterproductive and costly measures. Thus, we should think of our association with the industry as a business transaction that,

like any other business transaction, should be conducted at a fair market value for the benefit of both the producer and the consumer.

Critics of industry participation in prevention efforts contend that alcohol education is not effective and, therefore, no matter how much money the industry gives to these efforts it would not make a difference. They further suggest that the only effective approaches to prevention are those that lower per capita consumption through reduced availability of alcohol brought about by increased taxation, reduced hours of sale, increased legal drinking age, limited advertisement, etc. To support their case, these critics point to the fact that the research on alcohol education has not been able to document long-term changes in behavior. For example, they can point to the lack of evidence that an alcohol awareness week or a BACCHUS chapter will prevent alcohol abuse on a particular campus. Even the Miller Brewing Company when they were considering support of BACCHUS conducted focus groups on campus and found that not many students knew of BACCHUS, and even among those that had heard of it, few had planned to change their drinking behavior.

The problem with these evaluation approaches to alcohol education is that they are too narrow and short sighted. It is true that there is no clear, direct link between alcohol education and behavior change. Drinking behavior, like any other form of human behavior, is governed by a complex interaction between individual and environmental factors. Individual perceptions of risk, beliefs about the severity of alcohol abuse, availability of alcohol, cultural expectations, too name just a few, all interact in complex ways to predict drinking behavior. Therefore, evaluation of programs that only address a part of this complex equation can not be expected in and of themselves to produce

significant results. However, anything that affects one of the predictor variables in a positive way increases the probability of a positive result. Our evaluation models have not yet developed the sophistication to ascertain how much each of the relevant individual and environmental variables contribute to the overall evaluation of alcohol education. Thus, we don't really know how much difference the formation of a BACCHUS chapter or the implementation of an alcohol awareness week makes in terms of overall prevention of alcohol abuse on an individual campus.

We do know, however, that in the last decade there have been some important changes in the way colleges and universities deal with alcohol abuse. The situation with regard to alcohol on campus has changed from what Nevitt Sanford called "a conspiracy of silence" to what can be described today as an attitude of active concern. For example, we've seen significant positive changes in the kind and number of alcohol policies on campus; the expectations of administrators, faculty, and alumni; the number of programs and resources committed to alcohol education; and, perhaps most importantly, there have been significant reductions in the number of students who drink and the amount of alcohol they consume.

Now, if you were to ask whether these changes are a direct result of BACCHUS and National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week, the answer is probably not. On the other hand, if you were to ask whether BACCHUS and National Collegiate Alcohol Awards Week helped create a campus climate where these changes could take place, then the answer is probably yes. We know that BACCHUS and National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week would not have been possible without the financial support of the alcoholic beverage industry.

Therefore, if you believe that BACCHUS and the National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week have made a positive contribution to the social and cultural changes that have occurred on campus with regard to drinking, then you must belief that industry support can have a role in the prevention of alcohol abuse. Could these changes have taken place on campus without BACCHUS and National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week? Perhaps. Would there have been even more pronounced social and cultural changes on campus if the industry had not been able to argue that they are making positive contributions and, therefore, restrictive measures are not needed? The answer to that question is: we'll never know. But regardless of where you stand on this issue, I think you will agree with me on one thing: for better or for worse, "we've come a long way baby."

Have a great and safe tenth annual National Collegiate Alcohol Awareness Week celebration. You have my best wishes for continued success with your programs. Thank you.